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SUBJECT: EMBASSY COLOMBO EAC MEETING 02/02/2009 RE SECURITY
DURING SRI LANKAN INDEPENDENCE DAY EVENTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: AmEmbassy Colombo convened a meeting of the core Emergency Action Committee (EAC) on February 2, 2009. The EAC discussed post's security posture and guidance to the expatriate American community in light of the upcoming Sri Lankan Independence Day celebrations and the possibility of terrorist attacks aimed at disrupting the planned events. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 2, 2009, AmEmbassy Colombo convened a meeting of the core EAC. Present for the meeting were the Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, Regional Security Officer, Regional Affairs Officer, Political Officer, Economic Officer, Management Officer, Consular Officer, USAID Director, Defense Attaché, and Office of Defense Cooperation Chief. The agenda items for the meeting were:

-- Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) security measures for the official event on Wednesday, February 4

-- Attendance by AmEmbassy officials at the official event

-- GSL security arrangements in Colombo and its environs during the week of the event (February 2 - 8)

-- GSL security arrangements for the "Deyata Kirula" exhibition scheduled from February 4 - 8.

¶3. (SBU) The GSL will mark the 61st anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence on February 4, 2009. This year, as in past years, the GSL will celebrate the occasion with a large ceremony showcasing the GSL's military forces, the venue for which is the Galle Face Green. Galle Face Green is located approximately half a mile north of the Chancery and approximately 300 yards north of the American Center. The Ambassador and Defense Attaché received invitations to the event and post expects that other foreign ambassadors or high commissioners, as well as GSL dignitaries, will attend the ceremony.

¶4. (SBU) The GSL's military forces have liberated areas of the country that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formerly controlled, and have placed the LTTE in a desperate situation. Last year at this time, the LTTE controlled a large swath of Sri Lanka's Northern Province, with the exception of the Jaffna peninsula. However, this year GSL's military achievements have forced the LTTE into an ever-shrinking area of approximately 300 square kilometers (as of February 2), located in the northeastern quadrant of the Mullaitivu District in the Northern Province. The LTTE may try to divert attention from the North and demonstrate that it remains a viable fighting force. Consequently, the possibility exists that LTTE operatives in the South (including Colombo) may carry out attacks to disrupt the Independence Day celebration or other events related to the holiday.

¶ 15. (SBU) Regarding security for the official ceremony, the RSO noted that GSL security forces are on high alert, anticipating that the LTTE will try to disrupt the ceremony. Security precautions for the ceremony, scheduled for the morning of February 4, will be stringent. GSL security will conduct bomb sweeps and guard the venue on a 24-hour basis. The navy will patrol the sea adjacent to the site. Security forces will strictly control access to the event. Police and military forces will close and cordon adjacent roads and only invited guests may access the area. It will be difficult for a suicide bomber, either on foot or in a vehicle, to gain access to the area and attack the event or its participants. The presence of western government dignitaries (ambassadors, high commissioners, defense attaches, etc.) may add to the security of the event, since the LTTE has never intentionally attacked western government officials. Some EAC members conjectured that the LTTE may now be less likely to consider the safety of western dignitaries who may be in proximity to an attack on a GSL target. However, the EAC concurred that available information, absent a specific threat to the event, did not preclude the Ambassador and Defense Attaché from attending the official ceremony. The Ambassador agreed and they will attend the ceremony.

¶ 16. (SBU) The RSO advised the EAC that police sources were worried about possibility of LTTE suicide cadres attacking the security forces stationed at the numerous checkpoints leading into the high security zones. Other EAC members added that GSL sources believed the rehearsals for the official ceremony are potential targets for an LTTE attack as well, with large numbers of military personnel practicing for the ceremony. Overall, the threat to Embassy employees (American

or local) and to the Amcit expatriate community remains being caught in proximity to an attack on a host government target. Although this is the same threat about which post already provides warnings, the EAC concurred that it would be prudent to reiterate the threat in an updated Warden message that highlights this week's activities.

¶ 17. (SBU) Another event taking place in Colombo in connection with Independence Day is the "Deyata Kirula" (Crowning the Nation) exhibition at the Bandaranaike Exhibition Hall. The Public Diplomacy (PD) section planned to erect a booth at the exhibition, at the GSL's invitation. The EAC recommended that the RSO visit the venue, assess the security arrangements, and recommend if PD should proceed with its plans. The RSO toured the venue soon thereafter. RSO observed that the event combined all of the types of situations that post advises Mission personnel and expatriate Amcits to avoid - that is, large public gatherings and GSL economic, political, military or police personalities and installations. Therefore, the RSO recommended that PD cancel its planned exhibit. The DCM and Ambassador concurred with the RSO's recommendation.

¶ 18. (SBU) Post will advise the official and expatriate American communities of the following:

-- Avoid the Galle Face Green area for the duration of this week.

-- Avoid large public gatherings, such as the Deyata Kirula exhibition scheduled for February 4 - 8.

-- Limit unnecessary movements in Colombo for the rest of the week due to the increased likelihood of attacks as well as major traffic disruptions.

¶ 19. (U) Post will continue to monitor the security environment and will report further developments, if any, septel. POC for this message is RSO Michael V. Perkins, who may be contacted at 94.11.249.8885, 94.11.249.8888 (MSG Post 1 after regular business hours), or via the classified and unclassified email systems.

Blake